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WARDS OF THE CITY OF NORWICH.

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THE WARDS

OF THE

CITY OF NORWICH,

Their Origin and History.

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM HUDSON, M.A.,

Vicar of St. Peter Permountergate, Norwich; and Hon. Sec. of the Norfolk and Norwich Archæological Society.

LONDON:

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PREFACE.

THE immediate occasion which has suggested this account of the Wards of the City of Norwich is the proposal made some few months ago to re-organise their boundaries, and make them coincide better with the fluctuation, and still more the unprecedented increase of the population since the last revision in 1835. The proposal having been accepted by the Town Council will, no doubt, be carried to a conclusion, and the present time, therefore, may appropriately be taken to lay before the citizens as accurate an account as possible of the institutions their representatives are once more about to revise. These institutions may be fairly said to be co-eval with the independent life of the City itself. Their history from the time when the municipal divisions of the City were (speaking generally) organised as the Four Great and Twelve Small Wards may be read in Blomefield's History of Norwich, and there are some still living who remember that organization. But the history of the earlier Leets with their Sub-divisions, from which the Great and Small Wards derived their origin, has not hitherto been written, or, if written, has never been made known. It is here gathered almost entirely from the very valuable series of Leet Rolls of the 13th century preserved in the Guildhall. These Rolls are not noticed by Blomefield. They were well-known to Kirkpatrick, who often refers to them. It is hardly likely that so accurate an observer can have failed to be struck with the light they throw on the Ward organization which existed till 100 years after his time. But whatever he may have thought out and written on the subject, and perhaps left to the City with his other manuscripts, has been lost.

Having traversed this field of research, and knowing that, although few care to enter upon it, many like to know the results, I have here set down the conclusions I have arrived at, in the hope that I may at least make one aspect of the history of this ancient City more full of meaning to the student, and even of interest to the passing reader.

W. H.

NORWICH,

JULY, 1891.

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4. St. Clement in Conesford
5. St. Julian
6. St. Michael in Conesford
7. St. Peter Permountergate
8. St. Vedast
9. St. Cuthbert
10. St. Mary the Less
11. St. John de Sepulchre
12. St. Bartholomew
13. St. Michael at Thorn
14. St. John Timberhill
15. St. Martin in the Bailey
16. All Saints
17. St. Wynwaloy, or St. Catherine
18. St. Stephen
19. St. Peter Mancroft
20. St. Giles
21. St. Benedict
22. St. Swithin
23. St. Margaret
24. St. Lawrence
25. St. Gregory
26. St. John Maddermarket
27. St. Crouch
28. St. Andrew
29. St. Michael at Plea
30. St. Peter Hungate
31. St. George Tombland
32. St. Simon and St. Jude
33. St. Martin at Palace
34. St. Helen
35. St. Michael Coslany
36. St. Mary Coslany
37. St. Martin at Oak
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40. St. Olave
41. St. Clement
42. St. Mary Combust
43. St. Saviour
44. St. Botulph
45. All Saints in Fibriggate
46. St. Margaret
47. St. Paul
48. St. Edmund
49. St. James

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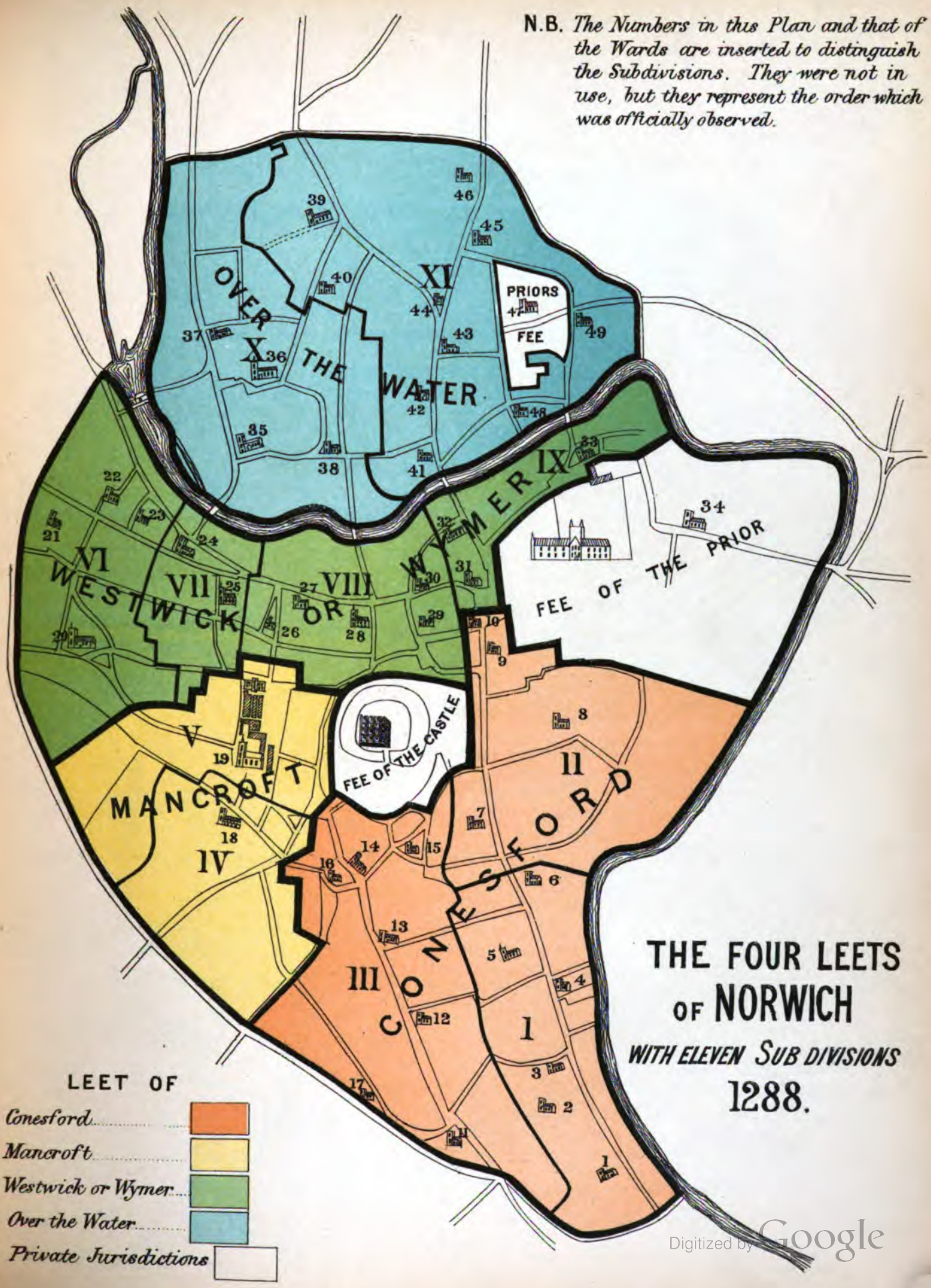

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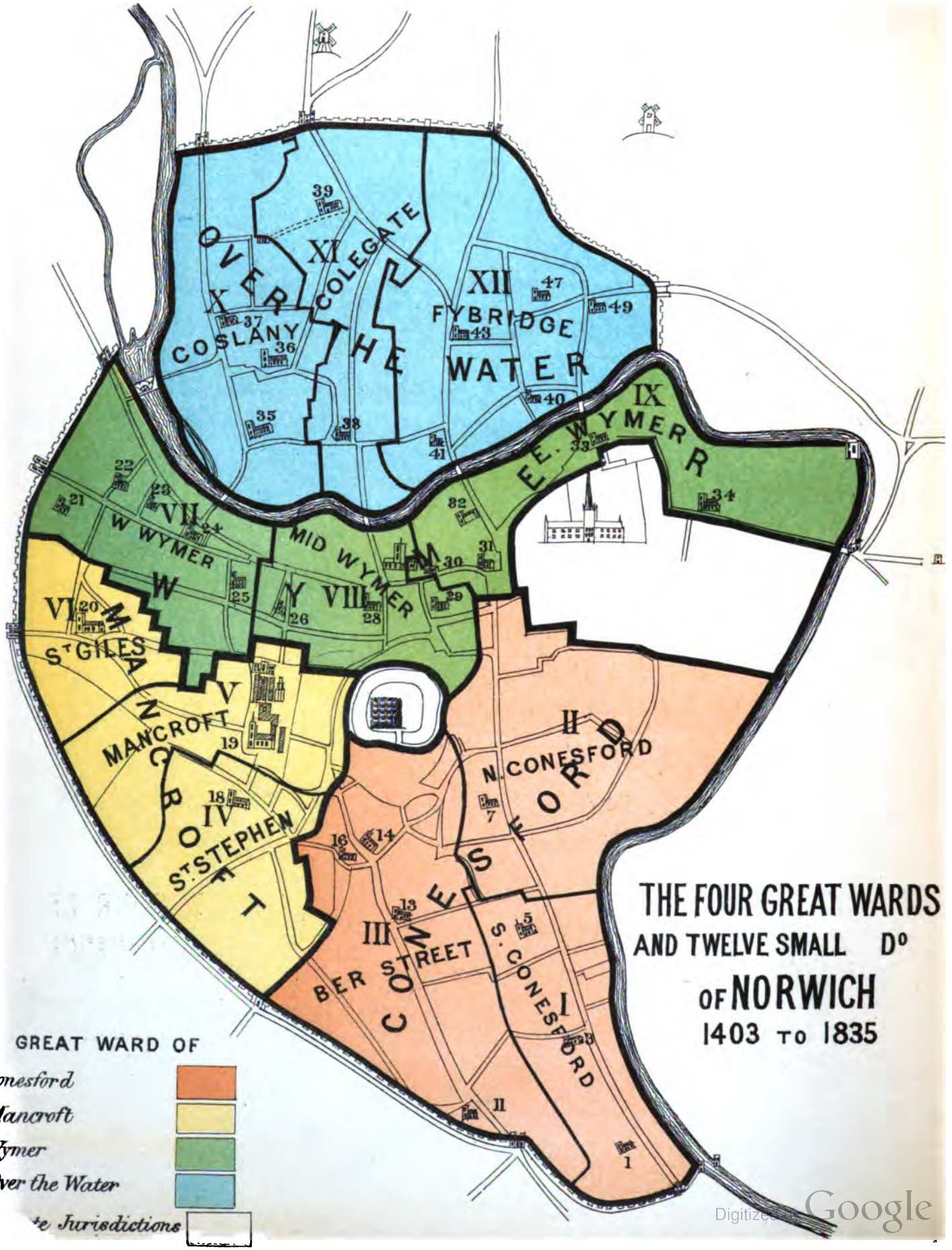

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LIST OF PARISHES ON MAP II (OPPOSITE).

1. St. Peter Southgate
3. St. Etheldred
5. St. Julian
7. St. Peter Permountergate
11. St. John de Sepulchre
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38. St. George Colegate
39. St. Augustine
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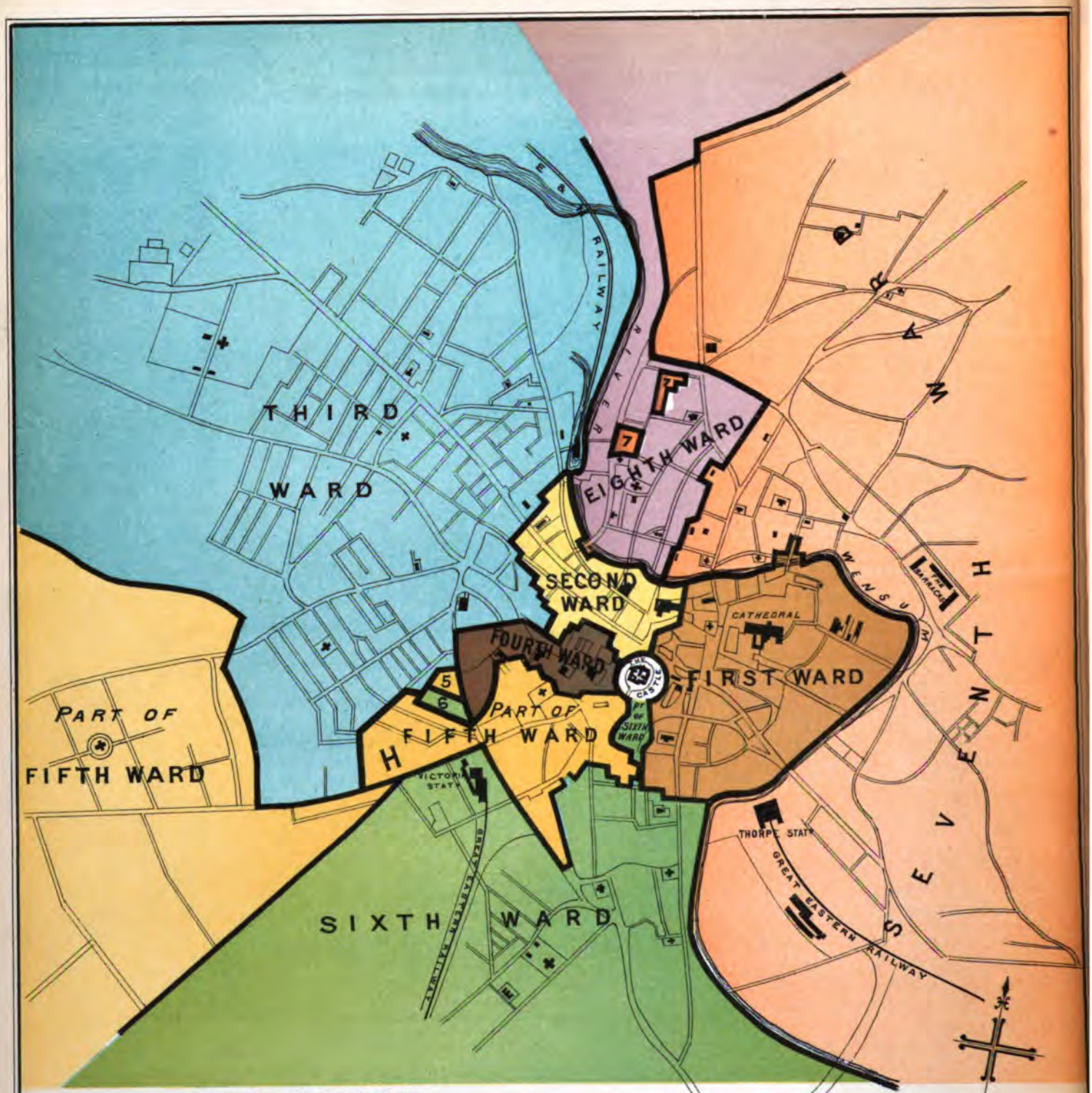

THE WARDS,

AS NOW DIVIDED,

1891.

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HISTORY OF THE WARDS OF NORWICH.

I. THE PRESENT EIGHT WARDS.

Municipal Reform in 1835.

The arrangement by which the City of Norwich and the adjacent Hamlets are divided into eight wards, dates no further back than from the year 1835. In that year was passed an Act of Parliament for the Regulation of the Municipal Boroughs of England and Wales. The Reform of Borough institutions had long been a matter of urgent necessity. The chief evil complained of was the monopoly of all electoral rights and municipal privileges in the hands of the "Freemen," who in many boroughs formed only a small portion of the whole number of the inhabitants. The Aldermen, who were elected for life, and after they had held the office of Mayor were Justices of the Peace for the Borough, possessed excessive powers, even of criminal jurisdiction. They also had control of most of the charitable institutions, and were accused of using the opportunities thus afforded them to provide for their dependents, and to secure votes for the next ensuing election.

By the provisions of this Act the municipal franchise was extended within certain limits to all substantial householders or owners, if resident within 7 miles; the inhabitants of the suburbs were admitted to equal privileges with the citizens; the exceptional powers and privileges of the Aldermen were curtailed or abolished, and a re-arrangement was made of the "wards" or sections into which the city was divided for electoral and administrative purposes.

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Number of Wards Changed—Old Names Disused.

It is with this last change alone that I am proposing now to deal. And before entering on the origin of the City Wards I must ask my readers to suffer me to make an assumption, which, however, I am not quite sure that I am justified in making. It is, to be allowed to treat the wards which were organized after the Municipal Reform Act, as being the legitimate successors of those which existed before that Act. Judging from the language of the Act itself, I am afraid the Legislators of that day considered themselves as making a clean sweep of previously existing divisions, and organizing new ones as if none had existed before. Parliament declared how many wards each borough was to have, and then barristers were sent round the country to settle the boundaries of the wards on certain fixed principles. The result was that all the old names by which the wards had for several hundred years been associated each with its own particular locality were disused, and the numbers 1 to 8, which did not even follow the old order, were substituted. Still the organization, however changed, remained substantially the same. And I venture to think that there are not many citizens who would not take a legitimate pride in the thought that any institutions of their city could be traced back in uninterrupted exercise for nearly 700 years. Such, I believe, I can show to be the case with the City Wards.

The number of Wards assigned to Norwich in the Act of 1835 was eight. Before that time there had been 12. On what principle the new assignment was made is not explained. It seems strange that when the object was to increase the electorate it should have been thought advisable to reduce the number of municipal divisions. Possibly it was done with a view to reduce the number of persons forming the governing body. The 12 wards had been represented by 24 Aldermen and 60 Councillors. For the future the 8 wards were to be content with 16 Aldermen and 48 Councillors. Leaving, however, any further consideration of the intentions of the Legislature in the changes made in 1835, I will explain in more detail what were the divisions which were existing before that time.

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II. THE FOUR GREAT AND TWELVE SMALL WARDS (1403—1835)

The 12 Wards already mentioned did not stand entirely by themselves. Their correct title was the "Twelve *Small* Wards," and they were (theoretically) subdivisions of four larger sections called the "Four *Great* Wards." This double organization of four great divisions sub-divided into twelve small divisions is perhaps the most interesting feature in the old municipal organization of Norwich, for, so far as I know, no other borough was similarly organized. At the time of the passing of the Municipal Reform Act, the place which the four great wards occupied in the system was one of paramount importance, for the franchise was attached to them and not to the small wards. At present the sole relic of their existence is to be found in the five registration districts of the city. In that form their memory is pointedly revived once in ten years. When at the recent census the returns for the city were issued under the districts of Conisford, Mancroft, East and West Wymer, and Coslany, the city was unconsciously perpetuating the use of its four ancient divisions, one name only being changed.

The names and boundaries of the Great and Small Wards were as follows:—

1. The Great Ward of *Conesford*, subdivided into
   - (*a*) The small ward of *South Conesford*, containing the parishes of St. Peter Southgate (including part of the Suburb in Trowse and Carrow), St. Etheldred, and St. Julian.
   - (*b*) The small ward of *North Conesford*, containing the parish of St. Peter Permountergate, and part of St. George Tombland (the dissolved parishes of St. Cuthbert and St. Mary the Less).
   - (*c*) The small ward of *Ber Street*, containing the parishes of St. John Timberhill, All Saints, St. Michael at Thorn, and St. John de Sepulchre.
2. The Great Ward of *Mancroft*, subdivided into
   - (*a*) The small ward of *St. Stephen.*

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(*b*) The small ward of *St. Peter Mancroft.*

(*c*) The small ward of *St. Giles.*

Each of these three small wards coincided with the parish of the same name.

3. The Great Ward of *Wymer*, subdivided into

(*a*) The small ward of *West Wymer*, containing the parishes of St. Benedict (with part of Earlham and Heigham), St. Swithin, St. Margaret, St. Lawrence, and St. Gregory.

(*b*) The small ward of *Middle Wymer*, containing the parishes of St. John Maddermarket, St. Andrew, and St. Michael at Plea.

(*c*) The small ward of *East Wymer*, containing the parishes of St. Peter Hungate, St. Simon and St. Jude, St. Martin at Palace, St. Helen, and part of St. George Tombland, (the original parish).

4. The Great Ward *Over-the-Water*, subdivided into

(*a*) The small ward of *Coslany*, containing the parishes of St. Martin at Oak, St. Mary and St. Michael Coslany.

(*b*) The small ward of *Colegate*, containing the parishes of St. George Colegate, and St. Augustine.

(*c*) The small ward of *Fybridge*, containing the parishes of St. Clement, St. Edmund, St. James, St. Paul, St. Saviour.

It will thus be observed that each of the four Great Wards was subdivided into three Small Wards. I cannot say exactly when the arrangement of the 12 Small Wards took this definite form, but I think it was probably not long after the great changes in the government of the city, which were made between 1403 and 1417. At that time a Mayor and two Sheriffs were substituted for four Bailiffs; the 24 citizens who formed the Mayor's Assessors or Council were first called Aldermen; a common Council began to be elected, and the four great divisions of the city were first called "Wards."

Although, however, the four great divisions then took the new name of "Wards," they had been in existence under the older name of "Leets" for more than 200 years previously. And the smaller sub-divisions (also

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sometimes called "Leets") may be traced back for nearly that length of time. The origin of the larger divisions is, to a great extent, lost in obscurity. The origin of the smaller may, I think, be traced with more approach to certainty.

I will now, therefore, begin at the beginning, and state what can be ascertained as to the origin, first of the great divisions, and then of the sub-divisions.

III. THE FOUR GREAT LEETS, 1194—1403. THE SUB-DIVISIONS, 1223—1403.

The first detailed record of the division of the city into four great sections is in the Leet-Roll of 1288, which I shall describe presently. But there can be no reasonable doubt of their existence at least so far back as 1223. In that year by license of King Henry III., the headship of the city was transferred from a Provost to four Bailiffs. Now, as soon as ever we have any evidence on the subject, we find that the four Bailiffs were chosen for the four divisions, one for each. We must, therefore, suppose that the four divisions are at least as old as the appointment of four Bailiffs. It is possible that they are very much older even than that. Three of them, Conesford, Westwick (the more ancient name of the Wymer district), and the district, "Over-the-Water," were certainly occupied by a numerous population long before the Norman Conquest. The 1238 burgesses recorded in the Domesday Survey as having lived in the time of King Edward the Confessor (say about 1050), in the "Burgh," undoubtedly lived in these three districts. It is also certain that they must at that time have been like three separate townships, for Conesford was practically cut off from Westwick by the Castle Hill with its earthworks, and the part over the water was cut off from both the others by the river. The Mancroft district was first settled about the time of the Conquest, and added to the rest under the title of the "New Burgh." Thus as far back as the Norman Conquest we have these four great divisions actually existent. And it seems almost reasonable to suppose that they must have been utilized for such purposes as those of watch and ward in the borough.

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This may be the most convenient place to notice a statement made by a well-known writer, Sir Francis Palgrave. In his *History of the English Commonwealth* (I. 97), speaking of Saxon times he asserts that in East Anglia it was a practice to divide "a (Borough) Hundred into four Leets or Tribes,' each of which was sub-divided into three smaller divisions or sub-leets. If we could rely upon this statement we should be able to claim for this double set of divisions in Norwich an existence of something like 1000 years. But he gives no evidence to prove it, and what slight evidence I have seen of such a practice belongs to a later date. At all events it seems impossible to suppose that Norwich was divided into four Leets before the Norman Conquest, when, of the only known four, one was not in existence till that time. And the explanation I am about to give of the origin of the smaller subdivisions seems so obviously to show that they were intended for a particular purpose that I can hardly think they existed for any other purpose before.

My own impression is that these four great divisions were not definitely organized into administrative districts, such as we first find them, till at least the latter part of the XIIth century. The position of Mancroft as second in official precedence, though last in time of origin, presupposes time enough to have elapsed for it to have developed into municipal prominence. The same tale seems to be told by the vague name given to the fourth division, "Over-the-Water," as though describing a locality quite cut off from the heart of the living organism which sent out its pulsations from the Tolhouse and the Market place. The development of the centre of city life in the Market Place can hardly have been matured till many years after the Norman Conquest and the settlement of Mancroft. Again the names of the churches of St. Peter de Parmentergate and St. Peter de Suthgate seem to warrant the conclusion that in the 12th century the street in which they stood was still called by the two names of Parmenter street and South street, and not yet by the one name of the street of Conesford. And this seems to indicate that the district traversed by the street was not then recognised as one clearly defined whole.

What was a "Leet"?

I have already said that when we first find these divisions mentioned in our existing documents, they are called "Leets." The question of their

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origin would be much simplified if we knew for certain what was understood by a Leet. Here, however, we are met by a difficulty. Authorities have not agreed as to the meaning of the word. Palgrave, as quoted above, calls it a "tribe," no doubt supposing the word to be the Saxon "leod"—people. A writer in the Imperial Dictionary gives "Leet (Ang. Sax.: hlete, a lot), one portion of many." This meaning would very well describe the four Leets as portions or divisions of the city. But Professor Skeat (Selden Society: Vol. 2. lxxiv) asserts that it must be connected with the Anglo-Saxon "lœtan," to let, formerly pronounced "leet," and that it must describe the jurisdiction "permitted" within certain privileged districts. This is what the Leets were in the 13th century, jurisdictional as well as administrative districts. We must now consider what this jurisdiction was.

The Jurisdiction of a Leet. (*a*) View of Frank-pledge.

It mainly consisted of two things, the View of Frank-pledge, and the Presentment of Offences. Frank-pledge was a system in active operation under the Norman kings at least as early as king Henry I., if not earlier. Some writers think it was a continuation of a system practised among the Saxons, and called "Frith-borh" or Peace pledge. But the object of the two systems was different. Frith-borh was the voluntary association of neighbours for self defence. Frank-pledge was a compulsory association for the detection of crime. There is no evidence that the two systems were connected with each other. By the law of Frank-pledge every male of 12 years old and upwards was required to enrol himself in a Tithing. This was nominally a set of 10 or 12 persons, who were pledges for each other's good conduct. If an offence was committed, and one member of the tithing was suspected or known to be guilty and was not forthcoming, the whole tithing was fined. Each Tithing had a principal member who was called the Capital (or Chief) Pledge.

To hold a View of Frank-pledge was to ascertain that all the adult male inhabitants of a certain district were properly enrolled in Tithings. This was done by the Sheriff of the county once a year in the Hundred Court. In certain cases, however, a great lord, or the Abbot or Prior of a monastery would claim the right to hold this View of

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Frank-pledge for himself. The exercise of this right was not only a symbol of authority, but also a source of profit, for the fines inflicted on those who were absent or who had not enrolled themselves in Tithings were the perquisite of the lord. Probably this is what was meant in the 12th century by the claim put forward by privileged persons to "hold a Leet." It meant that they claimed the right to hold the "View of Frank-pledge" in respect of their own dependents. If the four great divisions of Norwich were called Leets in the 12th century, we must suppose that this right had been conceded to the citizens. But that privilege could hardly have been granted earlier than 1194, when King Richard I. gave them leave to elect a Provost of their own for their head, and to hold the city in their own hands.

(*b*) Presentment of Offences.

By the 13th century the holding of a Leet had come to include a much more important and profitable branch of jurisdiction, the presentment of offences and inflicting fines on the offenders. This does not appear to have been an original part of the system of Frank-pledge. The latest writer on the subject, Professor Maitland of Cambridge (Selden Soc.: Vol. 2. xxxi), suggests that it was an addition brought about in this way. By the ordinances of 1166 called the Assize of Clarendon, King Henry II. instructed his Sheriffs to make enquiry in every county and every hundred concerning murders, robberies, and other grave offences. This they were to do by calling upon twelve lawful men of every hundred, and four of every township to answer the enquiry. In cases where the Capital Pledges of the Tithings were already bound to attend to answer about the observing of the law of Frank-pledge, they were utilized to make the required presentments. Further, the private lords who held their own View of Frank-pledge soon began, according to Mr. Maitland's theory, to imitate the Sheriff, and proceeded to receive from the Capital Pledges of the Tithings presentments of the offences committed within their districts, and to exact the fines, which were a profitable source of income. When the Sheriff held this enquiry it was called the Sheriff's Tourn; when a private lord or a privileged borough held it, it was called a Leet.

There can be little doubt that the citizens obtained leave to hold in their own right these courts for receiving presentments of offences coincidently

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with the first appointment of four Bailiffs in 1223. The jurisdiction was part of the business of a Hundred Court, which court was presided over by the lord's steward or bailiff. The city of Norwich was itself a Hundred, and belonged to the demesne or private estate of the King. The Bailiffs, therefore, were the Bailiffs of the King's Hundred of the city of Norwich.

Description of a Leet Court.

A Court thus constituted in a private manor or a chartered Borough was in later times called a "Court Leet." In the 13th and 14th centuries it was simply called "The Leet." Norwich is fortunate in having in the Guildhall some very early records of the proceedings of its Leet Court. They consist of parchment rolls, mostly very neatly written and in good preservation. The language is Latin, and the style of writing is that called "Court Hand," full of contractions. To a student who has made himself master of the art of reading such writing, they present no further difficulty, and a most interesting picture they give of the social life of our forefathers from 500 to 600 years ago.

Although the Court answered to a modern Police Court, it must be remembered that a large proportion of the offences presented and fined were not moral offences, but related to such matters as encroachments on the king's highways or the river, or stopping watercourses, or having shutters that in the narrow streets flapped in the faces of people who were walking or riding, or blocking up the way by converting the public road into a private refuse heap. Then there were offences against the customary rights of the city, or the legal obligations of the citizens. People were fined who were found not to be enrolled in tithings, or who bought and sold without having been duly admitted to the "freedom" of the city, or who intercepted food on the way to the public market, and bought it up with the intention of selling it again, thus raising the market prices "to the great damage of the city and the country."

Most of all, there were the ladies, wives of the leading merchants and traders, who persisted in committing year after year the highly convenient and profitable offence of selling home-brewed beer at a higher cost than was declared in the Assize or fixed price. They were all annually presented and fined with the greatest regularity, the fines varying according to their

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presumed capacity, from 6d. up to 4s. This was a regular source of income to the city chest, and doubtless the offending ladies were treated in court with the same respect as a gentleman who comes now-a-days to pay his rates at the proper time. When it happened that the wife of one of the Bailiffs was to be fined she was called up first, and no doubt she paid her money down at once with all the dignity belonging to her husband's office.

Lastly, of course, there were worse offences, thefts, murders, assaults. Some of these were reserved for a higher court. Assaults are graphically described as "drawing blood," for our forefathers disdained to take any legal notice of such trifling matters as bruises or black eyes. All this, however, is outside my present subject, and I must proceed to show how these rolls throw light on the Ward organization of the city, and especially on the origin of the sub-divisions, which afterwards became the 12 small wards.

The Leet Rolls in the Guildhall. The Roll of 1288.

The Rolls are of two kinds. Some are Rolls of Presentments, the entries running thus: "Leet of Conesford. The Capital Pledges [giving their names] being sworn present on their oath that such a person has committed such an offence." No fines are recorded in these Rolls. The others are Rolls of Amercements or Fines, running thus: "Leet of Conesford. Of such a person for such an offence, 12d., &c." The earliest of all, of the year 1288, is one of the first sort, and so also is the third, of the year 1290. This latter one is incomplete, containing only Conesford, but as it happens just filling up for that Leet some information which is omitted in the first Roll. From the first of these Rolls we find that the Court sat in 1288 on the first Monday in Lent, and apparently continued its session for three or four weeks.

The proceedings began with the Leet of Conesford. First, 12 Capital Pledges, all marked as sworn, made their presentments. From the other Roll of 1290 we find that these were for the parishes of St. Peter de Suthgate, St. Edward, St. Etheldreda, St. Clement, St. Julian, and St. Michael de Conesford, *i.e.*, from Trowse and Carrow along King Street, as far as Morgans' Brewery. Then presentments are made by 13 Capital Pledges (11 of whom are marked as sworn). From the 1290 Roll it

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appears that this set came for the parishes of St. Vedast, St. Peter de Conesford, St. Mary the Less, and St. Cuthbert. In 1290 there were 12 presentors sworn for this district, and two more excused from serving. The 1288 Roll then contains the presentments from Berstrete, made by 12 persons all sworn.

Then follows the Leet of Manecroft, and first in that Leet the parish of St. Stephen, for which 12 sworn presentors answer. Then the parish of St. Peter de Manecroft. Here no less than 30 names of presentors are given. Of these the last six are not marked as sworn, and of the remaining 24 one is marked with a cross as absent without excuse.

After this we come to the Leet of Wymer or Westwick. [The heading is omitted in this Roll, but occurs in all the others.] In this Leet the first set of presentors, 12 in number all sworn, answer for the parishes of St. Giles, St. Swithun, St. Margaret, and St. Benedict. Then follow 12, all sworn, for the parishes of St. Lawrence and St. Gregory. Then 14, one not sworn, one absent without excuse, for the parishes of St. John de Madermarket, St. Crouch, St. Andrew, St. Michael de Motstowe, and St. Peter [Hungate]. Then 12, all sworn, for the parishes of SS. Simon and Jude, St. George before the gates of the Holy Trinity, and St. Martin before the gates of the Bishop.

After this comes the "Leta ultra aquam," or the Leet over the Water. For this there are two sets of presentors; first, 18, 17 sworn, answer for the parishes of St. Michael de Coselanye, St. George, St. Mary, and St. Martin; and lastly, 15, all sworn, answer for the parishes of St. Augustine, St. Olave, St. Botulph, St. Clement, St. Mary Combust, St. James, St. Edmund the King, St. Margaret, St. Saviour, and All Saints.

Comparison of the Divisions in 1288 with those before 1835.

I think it will be admitted that this document which I have thus described in detail is one of the most interesting and valuable in the possession of the Corporation. Here we have a picture of the city as it was divided for certain administrative purposes 550 years before the Municipal Reform Act of 1835, and yet we cannot fail to be struck with the general similarity, and, in most instances, the exact correspondence between the divisions at the beginning and those at the end of that long interval of

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time. They were, it is true, utilized for a different purpose but, allowing for some changes, we can hardly doubt that the later set of divisions was derived by a direct descent from the earlier.

Let us compare the organization as we find it in 1288 with that still existing in 1835. First, there are the four great divisions called by the very same names, Conesford, Mancroft, Wymer or Westwick, and Over-the-Water. The only difference is that at the earlier date they are called the Four Leets; at the later date, the Four Great Wards. The subdivisions also correspond in general, the changes being easily traced. In Conesford the three sub-divisions are almost exactly the same, it being especially noticeable that the division of the parish of St. George Tombland, in the latter case, between the two Wards of Conesford and Wymer, is explained by the fact that it included two parishes originally belonging to the former division. In Mancroft, two sub-divisions are the same, but at the later date a third has been added by transferring the parish of St. Giles from Westwick to Mancroft. In Wymer, St. Lawrence and St. Gregory, which before stood by themselves, are united to the first sub-division in place of St. Giles, thus reducing the number of subdivisions in that section of the city to three. The other two subdivisions remain almost the same, St. Peter Hungate only being moved. Over-the-Water, one sub-division, that of Coslany, remains the same, the other is divided, thus making three sub-divisions in that section. Thus we see how the fully developed organization of four great divisions, each sub-divided into three small divisions, arose out of the earlier organization existing in 1288.

Origin of the Smaller Divisions. Each Contained 12 Tithings at least.

What the exact number of sub-divisions was intended to be in 1288 may be considered in connection with another question—On what principle were the earlier sub-divisions formed? I conceive that the facts I have stated furnish a very sufficient answer to this question. They were formed originally so that each sub-division might contain at least 12 Tithings. It will be observed that of the 11 sub-divisions in 1288, no less than eight have 12 sworn presentors, or within one of that number. Some have more. The parish of Mancroft has a number equivalent to twice 12.

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The two sub-divisions, Over-the-Water, have almost three times 12 between them. It is plain, however, that each sub-division had at least 12 persons sworn to make true presentments. This was required by the law of the land. The Itinerant Justices in their circuits had long laid down this rule and just before the date of this Roll, in 1285, it had been declared by royal ordinance that no presentments of punishable offences should be made except by 12 persons at least.

Now it is to be remembered that each of these 12 presentors was the Capital Pledge of a Tithing. It follows therefore that each sub-division contained at least 12 Tithings; and we can hardly be wrong in concluding that this was the principle on which the organization was based. Where a parish or a group of adjoining parishes was found to contain at least 12 Tithings, and could therefore produce 12 Capital Pledges to make presentments, it was formed into a separate sub-division. Beyond this general conclusion the evidence available at present does not enable us to go.

Were the Sub-Divisions Intended to be Twelve in Number?

There are one or two questions I should much like to be able to answer. When was this organization of sub-divisions first made? Was it in 1223 or in the course of that century? Do the number of Capital Pledges whose names are given in 1288 represent the whole number of Tithings in the city? I fear these two questions must remain unsolved. One other is, perhaps, a little more capable of solution—Was the number 12 in the minds of the original organizers of the sub-divisions? In the Roll of 1288 there are 11. They might be reckoned as 12 by counting the Mancroft jury as equal to two, or the two large juries over-the-water as equal to three. But this is going beyond our evidence. Still taking into consideration the later practice of the city, and the undoubted fact that the number 12 was from the earliest times associated with the territorial Hundred, which was always represented at the County Court or before the King's Justices by 12 lawful men, there is good ground for supposing that the original number of the subdivisions in the city had been 12. There is, however, no indication that the four great divisions had been divided into four equal sets of three smaller ones.

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THE SUB-DIVISIONS WERE PROPORTIONED TO THE POPULATION.

One more consideration about the sub-divisions may be suggested. If they were originally arranged so as each to include 12 tithings, it follows that they must have been arranged according to the comparative density of the population in various parts of the city at the time when the organization was first made. A thickly populated parish like that of St. Peter Mancroft, or St. Stephen, was able to find the requisite number of Capital Pledges without being associated with any other. Or two central parishes like St. Lawrence and St. Gregory, though of small area, contained population enough to do the same. But in the more outlying districts where the population was more thinly settled, it was requisite to group together several parishes extending over a considerable area, before a sufficient number of Capital Pledges could be found to constitute a separate jury.

It is probable that by 1288, when our first view is obtained, the density of the population had become materially modified. As at the present time, it had increased in some districts and diminished in others. We have evidence that at the beginning of the next century some of the districts were greatly in excess of the legal requirements. We learn this from another most valuable document in the Guildhall, which is catalogued as Leet Roll, No. 9. It is not a Leet Roll but a Tithing Roll, the only one which has survived. It has no date, but may be proved to belong to about the year 1312. It contains the names of all persons enrolled in Tithings in the Leet of Mancroft, the names of the Capital Pledges being placed at the head of the Tithings. It is full of erasures and alterations, having evidently done duty for several years. So far as the original list can be made out, it contains the names of about 690 persons. This would easily allow of more than 55 Tithings. The Tithings entered on the Roll appear to correspond in number with the 42 represented in that Leet in 1288. They vary, however, very much in size, and sometimes two or three, containing 30 or 40 names, are combined under one Capital Pledge. The truth appears to be that even before the close of the 13th century, this Tithing system had become unsuited to a large town population. The form was so far kept up that the presentments continued to be made according to the old sub-divisions. So long as offenders were presented and the city chest was duly

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replenished by the fines, it mattered little whether the divisions represented a large or a small population. There was nothing to be gained by multiplying the number of Tithings, and very few people would be ambitious to hold the office of a Capital Pledge. Like the brewing housewives they were almost always made to contribute towards the civic income, being generally fined for the "concealment" of some offence. And their personal relation with their next door neighbour could hardly have been improved by their having him called to account publicly for his little misdoings. Moreover, a tendency had already begun which in the course of the 14th century produced an entire change in the administration of the city. This was the formation of a representative governing body of 24 citizens, a step which finally developed into the Assembly of Aldermen and Councillors. This governing body gradually absorbed both the administrative and judicial functions of the Leet.

Decay of the Leet Courts. The Divisions as Electoral Districts.

So by degrees the principal object for which the division of the city had been originally made ceased; the Leets became a kind of local vestry meetings, and finally died out altogether. Meanwhile the divisions became utilized for another purpose, as electoral sections. They had always been so to some extent. After the great changes in the constitution of the city government which were finally settled by the Charter of King Henry V. in 1417, the freemen of the various wards ceased to have any share in the administration of city affairs, except by the power they possessed of electing Aldermen and Councillors.

Here again we are struck by the peculiar feature in the municipal organization of Norwich, the strange mutual relation which existed between the 4 great divisions and the 12 small ones. During the earlier period whilst the Leet Courts were in active operation the smaller divisions were actual units, the members of the Tithings in each sub-district electing their own Capital Pledges, who made their presentments for their own locality, and chose the officials called "affeerers," who assessed the fines to be laid on each offender. But after the establishment of the Court of Aldermen and the Common Council, the power of electing the governing body was

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exercised by the electors of the great wards, and not separately by those of the small wards. Yet the Aldermen represented the small wards, and so in rather a vague manner did the members of the Common Council.

I will endeavour to give a brief, though, I fear, imperfect account of the electoral rights of the citizens, as connected with the various city divisions.

IV. HISTORY OF ELECTORAL RIGHTS IN NORWICH.

Election of a Provost (1194—1223).

The first official whom the citizens had power to elect as one of their rulers was a Provost, in accordance with the Charter granted by King Richard I. on May 5th, 1194. There is no sort of evidence to show how the election was managed. At Ipswich, in the year 1200, two Bailiffs and four Coroners are related to have been elected by the whole body of burgesses at open-air assemblies in the churchyard of St. Mary le Tower. The same may have been the case in Norwich, but in the history of early municipal institutions it is not safe to assume that what took place in one borough also took place in another.

Election of Four Bailiffs and other Officials (1223—1403).

In 1223 four Bailiffs were substituted for the Provost. This form of government continued till 1403. We are still without any evidence of the mode of election till 1365, the date of the earliest existing Assembly Roll. This Roll contains very brief minutes of the assemblies of the citizens for the management of the city. It covers five years, 1365—1369. The information it gives is, as usual in such documents, deficient on those points which our curiosity wishes to know. At almost every Assembly is recorded the election of some official, a treasurer, or a collector, or sometimes two or four of such officials; or frequently the election of a certain number of citizens to view some lands or tenements under discussion, or to undertake some special business. Unfortunately we are never told who the electors are. In one or two instances the elections are said to be made "by the

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whole community." We are left in doubt whether this means a promiscuous assembly of any citizens who happened to be present, or whether any organization existed by which the community was represented. One thing, however, we find, that whenever four or more persons are elected, it is specified that one, two, or more stand for each of the four Leets. The most important Assembly of the year was that for the election of the four Bailiffs. It was held on the 2nd Sunday in September in the Chapel of St. Mary-in-the-Fields. First in the minutes are recorded the "names of 24 citizens elected and sworn for the purpose of electing Bailiffs for the year following." These 24 are made up of four sets, one set of six for the Leet of Conesford, another for that of Mancroft, another for Wymer, and another for Over-the-Water. Then follow the names of the "Bailiffs elected by the aforesaid sworn electors." From the way in which the names are written it is plain that one of the four Bailiffs was elected for each Leet, and by the six of the Leet which he was to represent. The names of the Bailiffs are not among the 24. What we should like to know is—How these sets of electors were themselves elected? As there is no trace of their election at the time, but only the record of their names as having been elected, we are perhaps justified in concluding that they had been previously elected by the citizens of their own Leet, but how we are quite at a loss to say.

Annual Election of 24 Representative Citizens (1330—1415?).

It is also doubtful whether these 24 were only elected for the special purpose of choosing Bailiffs, or whether they were the same as the 24 mentioned elsewhere. In the *Old Free Book* (a bound volume in the Guildhall), we find on folio v. a list of the names of 24 persons elected "by the whole community" at Michaelmas, 1344, for a year, and on folio xii. a similar list for the following year. The object of their election, as stated in the first entry, is rather vague. In the second entry they are said to be elected "from the city of Norwich, for the commonalty, and for ordering and watching over the business of the same." In 1345 six are elected for each Leet; in 1344 there is the unusual distribution of four for Conesford, ten for Mancroft, ten for Wymer, and two for Over-the-Water.

At a still earlier date than these entries (perhaps shortly before 1340)

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were compiled some *Chapters of Customs antiently used in the City of Norwich*, which are to be found in the *Book of Pleas* (another bound volume in the Guildhall). In chapter xlvi., mention is made of supervisors of trades, who were to protect the public from fraudulent dealings. They are to be chosen by "the Bailiffs and the 24 *elected in common* from the city." I suppose this means elected by the whole commonalty. The annual election of 24 citizens by the commonalty to act as a governing council in conjunction with the Bailiffs was finally confirmed by a Charter of King Richard II. in 1378.

It appears then that from 1194 to 1223, the citizens had the right of electing a Provost for their head, and from 1223 to 1403 of electing four Bailiffs. Through the latter half of the 14th century they also elected, with gradually increasing formality, 24 citizens to form a representative council. So far as existing evidence enables us to judge, it is probable that, at least from 1223 onwards, the exercise of the franchise was organized on the basis of the four great Leets, in each of which the citizens voted separately, and each of which had its own representative among the persons elected to serve for the whole city.

Election of Aldermen and Common Councillors (1415—1835).

When we come to the great municipal changes at the beginning of the 15th century, we find ourselves treading on firmer ground, though even then some matters are by no means so clear as we should wish.

In 1403 the city of Norwich was, by a Charter of Henry IV., made into a county, and in place of the four Bailiffs, the presiding officials of a *Hundred* Court, were substituted two Sheriffs, the proper officials to preside over a *County* Court. The citizens also were empowered to elect a Mayor, who should be the King's Eschaetor, that is, should be authorized to collect and answer to the King for dues, fines, &c., which had hitherto been collected by some outsider specially appointed to that office. Both the Mayor and the Sheriffs were elected, but their mode of election in no way touches the division of the city into wards.

Two changes, however, were made which concern our subject. First, the 24 representative citizens were not only confirmed in their position of authority as the Mayor's Assessors, but they obtained by degrees very

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extensive powers. In 1403, four of them, in conjunction with the Mayor, were empowered to act as Justices of the Peace for the trial of such offences as at that time came within the cognizance of such Justices in the country districts. In 1417, by a Charter of Henry V., they are for the first time called "Aldermen," and previously, in 1415, it had been arranged that instead of being elected for one year they were to stand *for life.* Still later, in 1452, the magisterial authority just mentioned was extended, so that all the Aldermen who had served the office of Mayor became Justices of the Peace for the city. Thus, in place of the old Leet Courts, a permanent local magistracy was established in Norwich.

Meanwhile a Common Council was also formed. It would take too long to detail the progressive stages by which these various changes were developed. I must confine myself to saying that the Common Council was the result of disputes between the upper class of citizens and the main body or "commonalty," whose privileges had become greatly monopolized by the "24." The Common Council were representatives of the commonalty. A composition or agreement between the two disputing sections of the community was drawn up in 1415 in accordance with which 60 Common Councillors were to be annually elected.

Common Councillors Elected for the Small Wards by the Electors of the Great Wards.

The method of election was as follows:—On the Monday before Easter the citizens of Conesford Ward (that is, the Great Ward) were to meet at the Guildhall (then recently built), and elect 12 Councillors, six for Conesford, and six for Ber street. On the Tuesday the citizens of Mancroft (Great) Ward, were to elect 16, five for St. Stephen, seven for Mancroft, and four for St. Giles. On Wednesday the citizens of Wymer (Great) Ward were to elect 20, seven for St. Gregory, seven for St. Andrew, and six for St. George Tombland. On Thursday the citizens in the (Great) Ward Over-the-Water, were to elect 12, six for Coslany, and six for Fibrigge. It is in this composition in 1415 that the four Great Divisions are first called "Wards" instead of "Leets." The electors are given in Blomefield's *History of Norwich* as "all the freemen and householders."

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But this is plainly an error. The actual expression is "all the enfranchised men householders," and this is evidently the same as the Latin description in Henry V.'s Charter where it stands "omnes cives habitantes et hospicia sua per se tenentes." Blomefield translates this "all citizens, inhabitants, and housekeepers." He could hardly have intended what would amount to universal suffrage. The meaning plainly is "all citizens who are resident, and have separate households." This is simply a definition of what was afterwards expressed in English by the term "freemen." In earlier times a "citizen" was one who had been admitted into the freedom of the city on payment of a prescribed admission fee, and he was bound to have a household of his own. In the 36th Chapter of Customs mentioned above it is stated that a newly admitted citizen if he did not possess a separate household of his own was required to establish one within a year, otherwise he would be recognized as no more than a "foreigner." The community required him to have something they could destrain upon in case he was in default.

In reference to this account of the election of Councillors may be noticed first, the unequal distribution of the number of Councillors as assigned to the sub-divisions. It is obvious that they were proportioned to the population, which was densest in the central part of the city. Next, that the citizens in the Great Divisions elected in common the representatives of the sub-divisions of their Ward. I doubt whether they were obliged to choose them out of each sub-division. Even in the case of the election of six members of the "24," the electors of a Great Division might choose them outside if they could not find a sufficient number properly qualified within their own limits. Thirdly, though the sub-divisions have names, they are not yet the distinctive names we find later. And fourthly, there are only ten sub-divisions mentioned. This is a point of some difficulty, as we shall see in speaking of the Aldermen and the 12 Small Wards.

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The Aldermen also Chosen for the Small Wards by the Electors of the Great Wards.

The Small Wards at first called "Aldermanries."

We will now pass to the election of the Aldermen. By the composition of 1415 they became life-holders of their office, and in 1417 first assumed the title of Aldermen. They were elected in equal sets of six for each Great Ward. In their case the old principle of equal distribution was retained in contrast with the newer method adopted for the Common Council. Here comes in the difficulty just mentioned. Had they any connection with the sub-divisions? No such connection is indicated in the account of their election. But after no great lapse of time this connection became a very intimate one. In the *Old Free Book*, fol. clx., is a document (in Latin) giving the details of an assessment of a "Tenth" on the city. It, unfortunately, has no date, but must belong to an earlier period than 1520, when the exempt jurisdiction over some parts of the city outside the monastery was resigned by the Prior. Blomefield mentions a writ demanding a Tenth in 1452, which would accord very well with the character of the document. It begins with stating the sums assessed upon the city in its four Wards, stating separately the assessments upon the sub-divisions of each Ward. These sub-divisions are in each case three (with some additions of specially privileged localities). Their names are, 1. In Conesford—South Conesford, North Conesford, Ber Street. 2. In Mancroft—Nedham, Mancrofte, Newport. 3. In Wymer—Westwyk, Wymer, East Wymer. 4. In Over-the-Water—Coslanye, Colegate, Fybryggate. After this follows a most interesting statement, which certainly reads as though it were intended to describe some organization which at least in some of its details was of recent formation. It begins "Note. The City of Norwich is divided into four parts (quadripartita) in the following wards, viz.: Conesford, Mancroft, Wymer, and Ultra Aquam." It then goes on to describe in detail the exact boundaries of each of the sub-divisions mentioned above in the Wards of Conesford and Mancroft. After the first sub-division of Wymer it breaks off abruptly so that the rest of the city is missing. The boundaries agree with those already given as existing in 1288, and afterwards slightly modified. The point of special importance in this descrip-

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tion is the name given to the sub-divisions. In some earlier documents they are called "Leets," either because they formed separate Leet-courts, or because the word had come to be used for "district." They are here called "Aldermanries"; the "Aldermanry of South Conesford," the "Aldermanry of North Conesford," &c. This term unquestionably implies some close connection between the Aldermen and the sub-divisions which have now definitely assumed the number of 12. What the connection was it is difficult to say. The word might mean a district represented by an Alderman. Or, as I think, with more probability, it meant a district presided over by an Alderman. If this is the correct interpretation, it would appear that, perhaps from their very first appointment with magisterial powers, the Aldermen were charged with certain duties, such as the preservation of the peace, each in his own district. We have seen that by Charter in 1452, those Aldermen who had passed the Chair of Mayoralty were Justices of the Peace for the whole city. Either then or later it was held that an Alderman not so qualified was yet competent to exercise jurisdiction in matters arising out of his own district. This right was specifically confirmed by the Charter of Charles II. in 1663.

By the latter part of the 15th century the 12 sub-divisions had finally assumed the names by which they were known till 1835; South Conesford, North Conesford, Ber Street; St. Stephen, Mancroft, St. Giles; West Wymer, Middle Wymer, East Wymer; Coslany, Colegate, Fybridge. They are so called in an Assessment for the repair of the city walls in 1481. In 1491 they are called 12 wards, but I do not know when the distinctive names of the "Four Great Wards" and the "Twelve Small or Petty Wards" first came into use.

From this time no further change was made affecting the constitution of the 12 city divisions, which continued to be represented by two Aldermen and their stated number of Councillors till the passing of the Municipal Reform Act.

Election of Three Nominees for the Council by each Great Ward (1729).

One alteration may be mentioned in the mode of electing the Common Councillors which was certainly remarkable. The electors, as previously

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stated, were the freemen of the Great Wards, who chose the Councillors in a certain proportion for each of their own Small Wards, the totals being 12 each for Conesford and Over-the-Water, 16 for Mancroft and 20 for Wymer. In 1729 an Act was passed for the better regulation of elections in the City of Norwich. By this Act it was ordained that no more than three Common-Council-men should be elected by the freemen of each great ward. These three were at once to fill up the required number for their ward. Thus the three for Mancroft had the privilege of electing 13 more, and the three for Wymer actually elected 17. The three were called Nominees, and, as might be expected, great were the efforts made by political partizans to get in Nominees of their own school. The Commissioners in their Report prior to the Reform Act are indignantly eloquent in their denunciation of the bribery and corruption to which this and other existing practices led.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.

The sketch I have thus given of the origin and history of the Municipal Divisions which from the earliest times have been in use in the city of Norwich is necessarily imperfect, and in some matters wanting in definiteness. But, I hope, while I have been describing the organization of the external frame, I have succeeded in throwing some light on the animating spirit which used the organization for its purposes as they developed themselves in the course of ages. These purposes may be broadly summed up as two; one, convenience of administration by the constituted governing authorities; the other, facilities of self-government by the election of duly qualified representatives to act in the name and for the interests of the general body of citizens.

Both these purposes may be clearly traced in the narrative I have given, and may partly explain the two-fold system of division which, as we have seen, existed for at least 600 years, and which I have drawn attention to as so distinguishing a feature of our municipal history.

In their primary origin the Four Great Divisions were, no doubt, administrative divisions only (perhaps of undefined area), subserving the

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peaceable ordering of the city by watch and ward, or the collection of the dues for which the citizens were responsible, through the Constable of the Castle, or the Governor or Provost appointed by the King.

Then came May 5th, 1194, a day for ever memorable in Norwich as the birthday of her municipal independence, the 700th anniversary of which is fast approaching. On that day the citizens, according to the practice of those times, purchased the city with its liberties and profits from King Richard I., and obtained the right to choose their own Provost from among themselves. I have not ventured to state as an ascertained fact that the Four Great Divisions at once assumed their future place as the four Leets of the city. It is, however, natural to suppose that they would become more definitely organized, and be used as the first channels of self-government.

At all events, with the appointment of Bailiffs in 1223, the other vital principle of municipal life, self-government, began to find its expression in outward organization. The Four Great Divisions were thenceforward known as the "Four Leets" or, Sections of Criminal Jurisdiction. And then, or soon after, must have been organized the Sub-Leets or sub-divisions, of which for a long time there were 11, but finally (and, perhaps, originally) 12. Both these sets of divisions were used for administrative purposes in the collection of dues, enforcement of civic obligations, and other matters. But it was with the exercise of self-government that the sub-divisions were for many years associated. The Leet jurisdiction, which I have slightly described, included matters which touched in all directions the daily social, commercial, and municipal life of the citizens, and it was entirely in their own hands. For more than 150 years the elected Capital Pledges of the Tithings continued to make annual presentments of the offences of their neighbours, and amerce the offenders according to an assessment made by some of their own number.

During the 14th century there grew up a changed state of affairs which culminated at the beginning of the 15th century in the establishment of the Municipal Assembly, consisting of the Mayor, Sheriffs, Citizens (*i.e.*, Aldermen), and Commonalty. Two great features characterized the changes which were then developed. One was the formation of a body of permanent magistrates, the 24 Aldermen, who inherited the jurisdiction previously exercised by the Leets. The Aldermen presided over the sub-divisions or small

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wards. A slight relic of this connection still survives. Of the present 16 Aldermen, eight are annually appointed by the Mayor to be "Ward Aldermen." In case of an election they are the Returning Officers of their wards.

The other feature was the formation of a representative Common Council. In the election of Councillors both the Great and Small Wards were taken into account. The electors were the citizens of the Great Wards; the number of Councillors elected was proportioned in various degrees to the several Small Wards. The right to elect representatives thus became the only share which the citizens retained in the government of the city.

This right was not enjoyed by the great body of inhabitants, but only by the limited class of freemen, and even they were at last restricted to the election of three in each ward or 12 out of the 60.

In 1835, the Municipal Reform Act made greater alterations in the city divisions than had been made for 600 years. The two sets of Wards were abolished. It does not appear clear whether Parliament in assigning eight Wards to Norwich, intended to double the 4 or to reduce the number of the 12 previously existing. The franchise was greatly extended and the excessive powers of the Aldermen curtailed.

Proposed Re-distribution. An Appeal for the Restoration of the Old Names in Place of Numbers.

The 50 years and more which have elapsed since that time have witnessed a growth in the city, and still more in the suburban hamlets, which has once more rendered a redistribution of ward boundaries a desirable object to be achieved in the immediate future, and the desirability has already been affirmed at the meetings of the Town Council.

The only object with which the foregoing information is now laid before the citizens of Norwich is to enlighten and interest them with respect to the institutions which have come down to them from their forefathers. Any remarks, therefore, which might be thought to further the views of any political partizanship would be entirely out of place. It is, I fear, too much to hope that an equally dispassionate and impartial spirit will pervade all the discussions which such a proposal, when it takes a definite shape, may be expected to provoke.

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One suggestion, however, I do not hesitate to commend to the consideration of the holders of every kind of political opinion. To restore the historical 12 city wards would be unnecessary, and to attempt to reproduce the old double system of great and small wards would be altogether unmeaning. But why not take the opportunity of restoring the old historical local names which centuries of use made "household words" to every citizen till within the memory of some still living? The titles, "First Ward," "Third Ward," "Seventh Ward," and so on, are suggestive of nothing more ennobling than storming political "strongholds," or keeping control over political "keys." But the titles, "Conesford," "Mancroft," "Wymer," "Coslany," and if new suburban names are wanted, "Trowse," "Eaton," "Heigham," are suggestive of memories too broad to be associated with any political party. They would remind the citizen of to-day that he is the heir to institutions which have helped to model the growth and progress of this ancient city through the greater part of its life of, perhaps, not far short of 1,000 years. Such an inheritance is not to be found everywhere, and the citizens of Norwich may be justly proud of it. If its memory can be preserved by the simple expedient of replacing the modern *numbers* of the Wards by the old time-honoured *names*, future generations of citizens will thank the present for retracing the false step so unnecessarily made at the last great revision of the City Wards.

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